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ABSTRACT

When students enter the classroom they are confronted with a wide variety of goals to strive for, activities to engage in, and challenges to face, across a number of domains: academic, artistic, sporting and social. Recently, there has been a growing recognition of this complexity of goals among researchers interested in student's motivational beliefs. This New Zealand study examined the relationship between Form Two students' (n=162) academic task values in two school subjects, mathematics and language, and their perceptions of social satisfaction in classrooms using a cooperative goal structure or in regular classrooms. Task values for engagement in mathematics and language activities were higher, and perceived costs lower, in classrooms using a cooperative goal structure. Higher task values and lower perceived costs were also associated with higher social satisfaction. The relationships between classroom goal structure, social satisfaction and task value orientation were mediated by gender. The interaction of gender and classroom goal structure suggested that girls are more affected by the nature of the classroom climate than are boys. This study supports current moves to extend research attention beyond the academic sphere and to consider students' perceptions of tasks within a wider contact. (JBJ)

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Classroom Goal Structures, Social Satisfaction and the Perceived Value of Academic Tasks

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Form Two students' academic task values in two school subjects, mathematics and language, and their perceptions of social satisfaction in classrooms using a cooperative goal structure or in regular classrooms. Task values for engagement in mathematics and language activities were higher, and perceived costs lower, in classrooms using a cooperative goal structure. Higher task values and lower perceived costs were also associated with higher social satisfaction. The relationships between classroom goal structure, social satisfaction and task value orientation were mediated by gender.

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Classroom Goal Structures, Social Satisfaction
and the Perceived Value of Academic Tasks

In recent years some concern has been expressed over a general deterioration in student's achievement-related attitudes and values as they progress through the school system (Eccles, Adler & Meece, 1984; Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1989; Nicholls & Miller, 1984; Stipek & Daniels, 1988). Schools may be designed primarily for the purpose of academic learning but they provide the setting for much more. When students enter the classroom they are confronted by a wide range of possible goals to strive for, activities to engage in, and challenges to face, across a number of domains: academic, artistic, sporting and social. Recently, there has been a growing recognition of this complexity of goals among researchers interested in students' motivational beliefs. For example, Ford (1992) has postulated a model of multiple goals that individuals may pursue, across a range of domains. Similarly, Wentzel (1989, 1991, 1993) has investigated the relationships between endorsing different social goals and academic achievement. These studies have demonstrated that students who report trying to be socially responsible also tend to be more successful in the classroom. While this work has reinforced the importance of considering classroom performance in the light of multiple goals that students pursue, it is not yet clear how beliefs in different domains influence one another. It is also unclear when holding multiple goals is adaptive and when it becomes problematic. Furthermore, previous studies have generally focused on social responsibility goals (e.g., trying to do what the teacher asks, or trying to keep quiet while other students are studying), rather than on other types of social goals, such as being accepted by one's peers and making friends.

The need for affiliation with and acceptance by peers has long been recognized as being of fundamental importance for children and

adolescents (c.f., Asher & Coie, 1990; Berndt, 1982; Berndt & Das, 1987; Furman & Robbins, 1985; Oden, 1980; Peery, 1979; Reisman, 1985; Sullivan, 1953; Townsend, McCracken & Wilton, 1988). Apart from the developmental importance of peer affiliation, it is also clear that children and adolescents value friendship (Reisman, 1985; Walker & Greene, 1986) and feelings of social competence. Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Miller, Reuman & Yee (1989) assessed the importance early adolescents attached to competence in each of four areas of school activity: the social domain, sport, mathematics and English. Students completed questionnaires twice during each of their sixth and seventh grade years. Across all four waves of assessment, mean ratings for the importance of domains were highest for social competence. That is, these students rated social skills as more important to them than competence in mathematics, English or sport. In so far as there may be a tension between meeting peer social goals and academic goals, the fact that school students place such high importance on peer relationships suggests that perceptions of competence and success in the social domain may influence academic task perceptions. Indeed, Wentzel's (1989) data suggest that the pursuit of peer social goals is related to poor classroom performance. However, in previous research by the authors (Hicks & Townsend, 1993), it was argued that the pursuit of both social and academic goals may only be undesirable when students feel dissatisfied with the degree to which their goals are being attained. Furthermore, it was suggested that such goal satisfaction or dissatisfaction in one domain may be related to perceptions of activities in other domains, through the variable of task value.

According to Eccles (1983) the perception of task value is affected by four factors which may be considered to represent two dimensions: positive or beneficial factors, and negative or cost factors. The positive factors include the intrinsic value of a task, its utility value, and its attainment value.

Thus, engagement in a mathematics course may occur because of interest in mathematics, or because the course is required for advancement in some other area, or because the student seeks knowledge about self-efficacy. However, participation in any task may also carry negative aspects or costs which will affect the individual's perception of that task. These costs may include the amount of effort that is necessary for success or the loss of valued alternatives. Because of the limitations of time and energy, a student's decision to participate in a mathematics task can result in the loss of valued alternative activities. Thus, an activity in one life domain may have high intrinsic, utility and attainment values, yet may act as an obstacle to success in an activity in some other domain. The cost of involvement in the first activity would decrease the overall value of that activity.

The extent to which academic task values and costs will be negatively affected by students' pursuit of goals in the social domain will depend on the degree to which the students perceive their social goals as being satisfied. Individuals who are content with their peer relationships are less likely to view academic subjects as competing for time and attention that could be spent addressing social goals. Evers-Pasquale (1978) demonstrated that children varied in terms of the value they placed on peer interaction. Those who showed greater value for peer interaction were more likely to benefit from an intervention programme aimed at reducing social isolation than similarly isolated children who showed less value for peer company. Thus, if individuals differ in terms of the importance they place on peer affiliation and social company, social satisfaction must be determined by the extent to which each person is meeting his or her own, self-determined, minimum level of social success. That is, all children and adolescents may hold goals in the social domain which they strive to achieve, but the degree of acceptance, popularity and intimacy necessary to feel satisfied with their level of such achievement is highly individual.

Eccles' (1983) model of expectancy-value theory is predicated on the assumption that an individual's beliefs about an event, and his or her interpretation of that event, are more influential on the individual's behaviour than the actual event itself. Similarly, in terms of the relationship between academic and social goals, the individual's subjective sense of social goal attainment may be more important than the actual attitudes and actions of his or her peers. For this reason, research of the type described in this report requires an assessment of the subjective level of satisfaction with social goals, rather than the use of external measures of social success such as direct observation or information gathered from peers.

In a previous study by the authors (Hicks & Townsend 1993), the subjective assessment of social satisfaction held by primary and secondary school students in New Zealand was found to be associated with their subjective values for mathematics and language. Students who were less satisfied with their social relationships reported lower levels of value and higher perceived costs for both school subjects than did students whose peer relationships were perceived by them as more satisfactory. This research was carried out across a number of classrooms and schools without regard for the instructional methods being used by teachers.

Because instructional methods vary in the emphasis given to social relationships among students, it seems likely that students' satisfaction with their peer relationships at school will be affected by the classroom learning and teaching structures they experience. For example, social satisfaction should be higher in classrooms where teachers utilise methods of instruction which provide greater opportunities for involvement and affiliation with other students. One such form of instruction is cooperative learning, where small groups of students work together to accomplish shared goals. Among the features that distinguish cooperative learning from traditional classroom instruction is an increased emphasis on learning and practicing social skills

associated with group functioning (Johnson & Johnson, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991). There is considerable evidence that cooperative learning methods not only have a positive effect on student achievement but also improve a number of dimensions of interpersonal relationships that may be reflected in social satisfaction. These dimensions include empathy for others, interethnic relations, acceptance of others, positive feelings toward others, quality of student talk, and cooperativeness. For extensive reviews of the nature and effects of cooperative learning see, for example, Johnson & Johnson, (1989), Sharan, (1990), and Slavin, (1990).

It also seems likely that the relationship between social satisfaction and form of instruction may be influenced by gender. Although many of the studies of cooperative learning have not been concerned with issues of gender, it has been argued that girls may benefit from cooperative learning classroom structures relatively more than boys (Gardner, Mason, & Matyas, 1989). Girls are more likely than boys to engage in a number of important behaviours associated with successful cooperative learning, such as turn-taking, verbal organisation, and helping others (Charlesworth & Dzur, 1987; Cosden, Pearl, & Bryan, 1985; DiPietro, 1981). Furthermore, some evidence suggests that girls have greater achievement and increased perceived status in classrooms with cooperative goal structures (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 1985;1986). Finally, girls express greater preference for cooperative learning instruction at school (Owens & Straton, 1980; Owens & Barnes, 1982). These findings suggest that social satisfaction may be greater for girls than boys in cooperative learning environments.

As noted by Totten (1991), cooperative learning is not simply students working in groups, sharing resources, or merely helping one another, as is often misconstrued. In addition to an emphasis on social skill development, cooperative learning is characterised by the use of heterogeneous teams,

structured goal interdependence (including a group goal and group rewards), and individual accountability (Nastasi & Clements, 1991; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991; Slavin, 1990). These characteristics mean that in a cooperative learning classroom there is a low degree of competition and a high degree of task orientation among learners. The low degree of competition is not surprising since a primary goal of cooperative learning instruction is to reduce the amount of inter-student competition normally found in classrooms (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec & Roy, 1984; Slavin, 1991). Furthermore, cooperative learning deliberately shifts much of the responsibility for learning to the students. For this to be successful teachers need to place greater emphasis on explaining the academic task, ensuring that students are clear about the assignment and that they understand the objectives of the lesson (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). In addition to this task emphasis provided by the teacher, proponents of cooperative learning argue that task orientation should be maintained by designating certain task orientation roles to group members. For example, a student might be asked to take responsibility for ensuring that the group is on-task, or to act as time-keeper, or to summarise proceedings to date, and so on (Ellis & Whalen, 1990; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991). Thus, students engaged in cooperative learning should perceive their classroom environment as low in competition and high in task orientation.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' academic task values and their perceptions of social satisfaction in cooperative and regular classrooms. It was expected that both task values and social satisfaction would be more positive in classrooms using a cooperative goal structure than in classrooms not using a cooperative goal structure.

Method

Subjects

The participants in this study were 162 children in six Form 2 classes at two intermediate schools (for children in Forms 1 and 2) in the city of Auckland. Three of the classes were taught by teachers who used cooperative learning strategies. There were 89 boys and 73 girls aged 12-13 years, from European (110), Pacific Island (33), Maori (4), and other ethnic backgrounds (15).

Materials

Social Satisfaction Scale. This 13-item scale was developed to assess student's perceptions of their acceptance at school, their feelings of loneliness or peer support, and their degree of general satisfaction with their peer social relationships (see Hicks & Townsend, 1993). Some of the items were adapted from Asher, Hymel & Renshaw's (1984) Children's Loneliness Scale (e.g., the item "I have lots of friends" was reworded as "I have enough friends"). Five additional filler items about interests and hobbies were interspersed throughout the scale (e.g., "I like to paint and draw") to increase students' comfort in using the scale. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale had moderately high internal consistency, alpha = .88.

Academic Task Values. Students academic task perceptions in both mathematics and language were measured using four scales adapted from those designed by Eccles (1980) for use with students from fifth to eleventh grade. The adaptations involved minor word changes to suit the local context (e.g., "good marks" rather than "good grades"). Three of the scales measured components of value associated with the task (i.e., intrinsic, utility and attainment values) while the fourth scale measured the cost of engagement in the task (i.e., effort required, loss of valued alternatives). The

scales have alpha reliability coefficients that range between .72 and .80 (Eccles, 1980; Eccles, Adler & Meece, 1984).

Classroom Goal Structures. In order to check that differences in classroom environment existed between the cooperative classrooms and contrast classrooms, two subscales of the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) (Moos & Trickett, 1974) were administered to the children. The CES is a 90-item scale designed to measure nine dimensions of classroom climate. Reliabilities of the different scales (based on alpha coefficients adjusted for average within-classroom item variance) range from 0.74 to 0.86 in 22 classrooms in the U.S., (Trickett & Moos, 1974), while similar reliability coefficients (0.60 to 0.90) have been reported for Australian classrooms (Fraser & Fisher, 1983). The Competition subscale consists of 10 statements (marked true or false) which measure students' perceptions of the amount of emphasis placed on academic competition within the class (e.g., Students try hard to get the best mark; Students don't feel pressured to compete here). The Task Orientation subscale consists of 10 statements which measure students' perceptions of the extent to which class activity is centred around the accomplishment of specific academic activities (e.g., Students are expected to stick to classwork in this class; This class is more a social place than a place to learn something). Items on the subscales were scored 2 if they reflected greater competition or task orientation, otherwise they were scored 1. To maintain consistency with local terminology, wherever the word "grade" appeared in an item in reference to the value given to a class assignment, it was replaced by "mark".

Procedure

Principals of intermediate schools were initially contacted by telephone to see whether they had mixed-ability classes of children at the same class-level being taught by teachers who either used or did not use cooperative learning methods. The principals of two schools were then

interviewed in person by the authors to discuss the teaching methods of the teachers who had been nominated by the principals. This procedure identified three teachers (two at one school and one at the other school) who were using cooperative learning methods at least part of the time in their Form 2 classes. For each cooperative-learning teacher at each school a contrast teacher was randomly selected from those teachers teaching at the same level and having similar groups of children but not using cooperative learning methods.

Children in each of the six classrooms were administered the Social Satisfaction Scale, Task Values scales, and the Competition and Task Orientation subscales in a single group session. The task was introduced to the children as helping the researchers find out about how children of this age get along with other children at school, and how they feel about learning subjects like mathematics and language. Prior to completing the scales, all children filled in a cover sheet which asked for their name, age, sex, and ethnic-group category. At the completion of the task children were given an opportunity to write down any comments they wished to make about their classroom, their life at school, or the test session. Each administration session took approximately one hour.

All testing was carried out by the two authors and one graduate assistant, who each administered a session in a cooperative and a contrast classroom.

Results

In a preliminary analysis, scores on the competition and task orientation subscales were analysed in separate two-way (Classroom - cooperative or contrast x Sex) unweighted means analyses of variance. For the competition subscale, the mean score was significantly lower for children in the cooperative group ($M = 13.89$, $SD = 1.39$) than in the contrast group ($M = 14.75$, $SD = 1.68$), $F(1, 158) = 12.36$, $p < .001$, $MSe = 2.40$. There was

no significant main effect associated with sex ($F = .05$) or for the interaction of classroom and sex ($F = .08$). For the task orientation subscale, the mean score was significantly higher for children in the cooperative group ($M = 14.41$, $SD = 1.39$) than in the contrast group ($M = 13.88$, $SD = 1.66$), $F(1, 158) = 4.90$, $p < .05$, $MSe = 2.37$. Again, there was no significant main effect associated with sex ($F = .10$) or for the interaction of classroom and sex ($F = .32$). The finding that children in the cooperative classrooms perceived their environment as less competitive and more task-oriented than did children in the contrast classrooms provides independent support for the judgements made by the principals about the differences in classroom goal structures apparent in the teaching methods used by the teachers.

Social Satisfaction and Academic Task Values

Scores on the social satisfaction scale and the four academic task value scales were intercorrelated for the entire sample. The coefficients are shown in Table 1. As may be seen, children's satisfaction with their social relationships was significantly related to their perceptions of the value associated with academic school tasks. Children with greater social satisfaction reported higher value, and lower cost, associated with mathematics and language. Conversely, children with lesser social satisfaction reported lower value, and higher cost, associated with mathematics and language.

Insert Table 1 about here

Cooperative Learning

The final set of analyses examined whether scores on the social satisfaction and academic task value scales varied as a function of whether children were in a cooperative classroom or a contrast classroom. A separate two-way (Classroom - cooperative or contrast x Sex) unweighted

means analysis of variance was carried out for each of the five scales. The mean scores are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

For scores on the social satisfaction scale there were no significant main effects for type of classroom ($F = 2.22$) or for sex of the children ($F = 1.34$). However, there was a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 158) = 3.76$, $p = .05$, $MSe = 43.20$. Pairwise comparisons using Fisher's t procedure (Keppel, 1982), revealed that girls had greater social satisfaction in cooperative classrooms than in contrast classrooms, whereas boys had similar social satisfaction in both types of classrooms, $t\ crit\ (158) = 2.91$.

There were significant main effects for classroom for three of the four academic task value scales. Mathematics value ($F = 11.64$, $MSe = 23.97$), mathematics cost ($F = 8.34$, $MSe = 2.96$), and language value ($F = 7.35$, $MSe = 23.56$); the effect for classroom was not significant on the language cost scale ($F = .57$, $MSe = 3.14$). The mean score for mathematics value was higher in the cooperative classrooms than in the contrast classrooms ($M = 28.80$, $SD = 4.59$, and $M = 26.05$, $SD = 5.45$, respectively). Similarly, the mean score for language value was higher in the cooperative classrooms than in the contrast classrooms ($M = 28.11$, $SD = 4.08$, and $M = 25.90$, $SD = 5.88$, respectively). At the same time, the mean score for mathematics cost was lower in the cooperative classrooms ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.49$) than in the contrast classrooms ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 2.01$). As noted above, the mean scores for language cost were not significantly different in the cooperative and contrast classrooms ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.76$, and $M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.83$, respectively).

In addition, there were significant main effects for sex associated with all four academic task value scales: Mathematics value ($F = 10.41$),

mathematics cost ($F = 10.03$), language value ($F = 12.87$), and language cost ($F = 5.67$). Girls had higher mean scores than boys on the mathematics value ($M = 28.89$, $SD = 4.10$, and $M = 26.26$, $SD = 5.71$, respectively) and language value ($M = 28.59$, $SD = 4.72$, and $M = 25.73$, $SD = 5.16$, respectively) scales. Conversely, girls had lower mean scores than boys on the mathematics cost ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.68$, and $M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.81$, respectively) and language cost ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.93$, and $M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.62$, respectively) scales. Finally, there were no significant classroom by sex interactions associated with any of the four task value scales ($F = 0.65$, 0.45, 2.17 and 0.16, respectively).

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the expectation that task values are more positive in classrooms where there is a cooperative goal structure. Students in the classrooms with a cooperative goal structure reported higher task values associated with both mathematics and language. These students also reported less cost associated with engagement in mathematics. The cost of engagement in language, however, was not significantly lower under a cooperative goal structure. Although previous research has not examined such task value orientations in the context of cooperative goal structures, the current findings are consistent with related findings in the research literature on cooperative learning. For example, under cooperative learning conditions students have more positive attitudes toward a diverse range of school subjects (including both general subjects and more specialized subjects such as agriculture, business education, industrial arts, and printing), increased commitment to achieving academic goals, and more positive attitudes toward school and society (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Totten, Sills, Digby & Russ, 1991).

Students' task values were also associated with their perceptions of social satisfaction, with greater value and less cost being expressed by

those with greater social satisfaction. This result with intermediate school students confirms previous research by the authors with both primary school students and high school students (Hicks & Townsend, 1993). This association between social satisfaction and task orientation to school subjects may be explained in terms of the loss of valued alternatives, suggested by Eccles (1983) as a component in task cost. That is, if some students feel that the amount of effort necessary to succeed in a particular task is such that it will interfere with their social goals, the perceived cost of engagement in that task increases. These costs appear greater to students who express greatest dissatisfaction with their social relationships. It should be noted, however, that these same students also reported lower levels of value associated with the tasks. Thus, the relationship between social satisfaction and task perception is more complex than simply a cost in terms of expended effort and time. In the present research, task value represented a composite of three factors: intrinsic value, utility value, and attainment value. It might be arguer that fluctuations in task value associated with social satisfaction are more likely to result from changes in perceptions associated with the utility and attainment values, since intrinsic enjoyment is likely to be more stable. Future research might investigate the extent to which each of the separate components of task value is related to goal satisfaction in alternative domains, and how these associations change with school experiences in the different domains.

In the current study, the relationships between classroom goal structure, social satisfaction, and task value orientation were mediated by gender. Girls expressed greater value and lower costs associated with both academic areas examined. This result parallels, particularly for mathematics, our previous findings with younger children, but is the reverse of the pattern previously found with high school students where boys expressed greater value and less cost associated with mathematics (Hicks &

Townsend, 1993). This suggests that girls in New Zealand schools suffer a decline in motivation during the transition from intermediate school to high school. This is consistent with a similar decline found in the United States educational system, except that the decline occurs with the transition from elementary school to middle school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). This later decline in motivation for girls in New Zealand may be a reflection that the instructional practices and classroom environments that affect motivation (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Midgley, Anderman & Hicks, 1995) are more similar across local primary and intermediate school classrooms than across intermediate and high school classrooms. Cultural differences in the association between instructional practices and student motivation need to be examined more carefully.

The interaction of gender and classroom goal structure in the current study suggested that girls are more affected by the nature of the classroom climate than are boys. This finding extends previous research where girls in high school science classrooms in New Zealand reported the classroom climate as being more competitive than did boys, and also expressed a stronger concern that the classroom provide a more cooperative environment (Townsend & Burns, 1994). Girls in the United States of a similar age to those in this study have also been shown to be more vulnerable to classroom climate in terms of other motivational constructs, such as learning and performance goals and their perceptions of self-efficacy (Urdan, Hicks & Anderman, 1994). It is clear that an examination of gender effects must be included in any further research in motivational constructs in school environments.

The major thesis of this work is that the expectancy-value model of motivated behaviours suggested by Eccles (1983), can be used to consider not only academic achievement behaviours but also achievement in its wider sense including, perhaps, the achievement of sporting, artistic, or

social goals. It seems likely that the number and salience of different goals may vary between individuals, but that these various goals must be kept in a state of equilibrium, with each goal being realised to some self-imposed minimal level. If one valued goal is not being satisfied, the balance of importance may shift, with that domain becoming, at least temporarily, more salient than others. That is, an individual carries multiple, parallel sets of perceptions and beliefs related to each of his or her life goals and these beliefs may interact with one another through the construct of task value. It was further suggested that the valuing of school academic activities may be enhanced under forms of classroom instruction, such as cooperative learning, that explicitly consider the social dimensions associated with goal structures. There is still much to be learned about the complex network of influences that constitute achievement motivation. This study, in which classroom goal structure was found to be related to academic task perceptions, lends support to current moves to extend research attention beyond the academic sphere and to consider students' perceptions of tasks within a wider context.

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Table 1

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among the Social Satisfaction and Academic Task Value Scales

	Social Satisf	Math Value	Math Cost	Lang Value	Lang Cost
Social Satisfaction	1.000	.196*	-.202**	.155*	-.158*
Mathematics Value		1.000	-.443**	.542**	-.055
Mathematics Cost			1.000	-.244**	.223**
Language Value				1.000	-.121

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Mean Scores on the Social Satisfaction and Academic Task Value Scales as a Function of Type of Classroom and Sex of Student

	Classroom							
	Cooperative				Contrast			
	Boys (43)		Girls (39)		Boys (46)		Girls (34)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Social Satisfaction	50.47	6.72	53.64	5.84	50.74	7.01	49.88	6.56
Mathematics Value	27.91	5.21	29.79	3.62	24.72	5.79	27.85	4.42
Mathematics Cost	4.84	1.41	4.15	1.51	5.78	2.03	4.74	1.83
Language Value	27.33	3.66	28.97	4.38	24.24	5.90	28.15	5.11
Language Cost	5.56	1.71	5.00	1.79	5.87	1.54	5.09	2.09